

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Rural Electrification Administration

Memorial Service for William J. Neal
and Theodore C. Perry
November 3, 1949

As you know, we have come together here today to do honor to the memory of William J. Neal, the REA Deputy Administrator since 1943, whose funeral was held at Meredith, New Hampshire, on Monday of this week. Also, we want to honor the memory of Theodore C. Perry, a field representative in our Applications and Loans Division, whose burial took place at Meade, Kansas, Sunday, October 30.

Bill Neal and Ted Perry, who lost their lives in an automobile accident out in New Mexico last week, died in the line of duty. We might even say they died in battle -- in the battle for a better rural America. They worked and they died in a worthy cause. While this fact cannot efface the stark reality of death, nor lessen the grief of those left behind, I think it needs to be recognized for what solace it might offer.

Ted Perry joined the REA staff in 1945. He did outstanding work in helping get electricity to the farmers in North Dakota, at that time one of the few remaining frontiers in the rural electrification field. Illness in 1948 forced him to request a transfer to the Southwest and he had been working with our borrowers in Arizona for more than a year. Those of you who worked closely with Ted Perry know that his heart was in the REA program and that he devoted his energies ably and unstintingly to the varied tasks assigned to him. He exemplified the high quality of personnel which has made it possible for REA to accomplish so much with so few employees. His sudden passing is a real loss to REA and he will be remembered fondly by the many friends he made during the four years he was with REA.

All of you know at least in a general way what Bill Neal has meant to the REA program. He was the ideal public servant from his first assignment in REA to his last. He always did his duty fairly, fearlessly, vigorously, thoroughly, efficiently, without complaint, and always in the public interest as he saw it.

In 1943 the war effort required some drastic changes in REA organization and policies. Some very controversial and unpleasant but nevertheless vitally important plans had to be made and put into execution. It became apparent to me that it would be advantageous to give someone this responsibility who was not in REA at the time, if a man could be found who was sympathetic to the program, who had the necessary ability and courage and who was also willing to undertake this most difficult task. After much search and inquiry I gave Bill Neal that job. Later events proved that to be one of the best administrative actions that I have ever taken. It seemed just a matter of days when Bill Neal knew more about every phase of REA than anyone else.

All during his tenure with REA he worked long hours! He met one crisis after another. He never flinched. He never complained. He made a very thorough study of every matter before him. His decisions were wise and impartial. He always acted in the interest of the rural people who are the beneficiaries of the REA program.

When I was talking to Mrs. Neal after the funeral on Monday, I tried to tell her how much we in REA were going to miss him. I told her of the tremendous load that he carried and how hard he worked and how fairly and efficiently he performed his tasks. She said that was the way he did everything he undertook. Her statement did not surprise me. I know that it will not surprise you who have worked with him.

In fact, Bill Neal's manner of doing things led me to give him the very difficult but very important assignment which he was on when he met his untimely death. He took this assignment without complaint. He and Mr. Perry had already made a thorough investigation of the problem and had some plans for arriving at a solution. Shortly before noon on October 26 he and Mr. Perry set out for a meeting on this matter which was being held at 7:00 o'clock that evening some 300 miles away. They were killed not through any fault of their own but only because they were doing their duty.

Bill Neal made many sacrifices for the REA program, but it was not until after his death that I came to appreciate fully the sacrifices he made for his family and for his ideals. His ideals and high sense of honor caused him to assume financial obligations which would have discouraged most men. He not only assumed them but he met them through sacrifices which he and his family made during his six years with REA. Meeting these obligations made it impossible for him to bring his family to Washington to live. His foresight, his careful planning, and self-denials make it possible in the future for his family to be in a financial position to avoid some of the unpleasant things he had carried during the last several years.

The homes of thousands of rural families today are brighter and happier because of Bill Neal's efforts. I do not think it is too much to say that many more thousands of farm families might never have received REA service if it had not been for the high standards which Bill Neal helped REA to establish.

Bill Neal was a loving and faithful husband and father. He was a great public servant. He was a successful business man. Like the man in Christ's parable of the talents, Bill Neal improved his talents and we can say "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

Everyone of us, who are in any way connected with this program, whether REA employees or members of REA cooperatives, are proud of the great record of accomplishment of REA. Bill Neal played a most important part in making that record.

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The greatest tribute that you and I can pay to these men who died in the discharge of their duty is to carry on in the way they did, so ably and so faithfully.

We have asked the Reverend Mr. Hutcheson to join with us today and to say a prayer in our behalf for Theodore Perry and William Neal.

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